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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN - ROIS BEAL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: BELIZE: ELECTION COVERAGE PLAN

REF: (A) BELMOPAN 008, (B) BELMOPAN 057

¶1. Summary: Post has prepared a plan to cover 22 of the 31 constituencies in Belize for the general elections taking place this Thursday, February 7, 2008 (reftel A). In total, 16 election observers from U.S. Embassy Belmopan will travel throughout the country. Each observation team is expected to visit 10-12 polling stations during the day. End Summary.

¶2. On Thursday, February 7, 2008, 16 Embassy employees, both local and American staff, will travel within assigned districts to observe the general election process in Belize. Six observer teams have been established and each is expected to visit at least 10-12 polling stations on Election Day. Four local employees have also volunteered to report on their experience voting to the central coordinator at Embassy Belmopan. The central coordinator will remain at the Embassy to take calls from the field. The coordinator will compile information and periodically e-mail WHA/CEN with updates.

¶3. Embassy personnel will be able to report from all of the six districts in Belize - Belize (City), Cayo, Orange Walk, Corozal, Stann Creek and Toledo. Post expects to be able to coordinate and provide information on 22 constituencies throughout the country.

¶4. In past elections, polling stations have opened at 6:00AM and closed at 6:00PM. However, the Election Commission has delayed the opening time to 7:00AM due to the additional referendum on the elected Senate (reftel B) and the anticipated extra time required to set up a second ballot box in the polling stations. This is likely to result in some confusion and potentially long lines in the morning for those who are uninformed of the change. Post plans to observe several openings and report the status to the central coordinator.

¶5. Employees are scheduled to observe several openings and multiple closings on Election Day. The ballots from all polling stations in a constituency will be counted in a central location at times ranging from 7:00PM to 8:00PM. In years past, there were issues with the movement of boxes to a new location for counting including long delays for the box to arrive a short distance for unknown reasons and power blackouts at the counting stations. Although Embassy personnel will not be permitted in the counting stations, several employees will also observe the transportation of the ballot boxes to the counting stations. Closing reports will also be called-in to the central coordinator.

¶6. We are not expecting violence or major demonstrations while voting is taking place. It is possible that the outcome in some constituencies may provoke demonstrations once results are known. The police and defense force will have a significant presence in potential hot spots, and Embassy observers have all been advised to return to the Embassy if there is any sign of violence.

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